



U.S. Army photo

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley traveled the globe talking to the troops to gain firsthand knowledge of the issues important to them. Above: the Sergeant Major of the Army talks with members of the 3rd Infantry Division deployed to Iraq.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley:

SMA bids farewell

Are you ready? That seems to be a constant question people keep asking me as I prepare for my retirement this month. I'm not sure if you can ever be 100 percent ready, but the time has come for me to say so long.

For more than 35 years I have worn my uniform proudly. I love being a Soldier. There have been long deployments, hard separations, tough living conditions, painful losses and horrible events along the way. I have watched friends and fellow Soldiers die defending the nation they love. It got harder and harder to lose part of my family.

However, despite those hard realities of our profession, it has been the most satisfying experience I could have ever asked for. I was blessed with an incredible wife, two terrific and outstanding sons, a wonderful daughter-in-law and two precious granddaughters.

It has been such an honor to serve as your Sergeant Major of the Army for the past three and a half years. I hope I have made a little difference in the lives of the people I've been lucky to have met. Any successes I've had as the 12th SMA are a direct result of you — the Soldier.

The 700,000-plus miles I've traveled have brought me up close and personal with you in every corner of the globe. I've tried to bring your issues back to the Pentagon and fight to make things better for all of us. Without your input, I could not have had any success.

One thing I've learned over my life is that no one succeeds alone. The SMA is no exception. I have worked with two

tremendous officers, Gen. Eric Shinseki and Gen. Peter Schoomaker. Thanks to these two men, the Soldier's voice is heard loud and clear in every decision.

Without a doubt, our CSM Corps is the strongest it's ever been. These leaders represent you well. They accomplish so much for so many. They have been friends, critics and innovators. Thank you for helping me so much.

I cannot begin to express my pride in the Soldiers — Active, Guard and Reserve — I leave behind to protect our Nation. Without a doubt, you are the most professional, highly trained and dedicated force we have ever fielded. The next Greatest Generation is here. Never doubt that you are the best.

I have been there with you in the mountains of Afghanistan not long after Operation Anaconda, in the streets of Baghdad during the war and in the rubble of the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. I have drawn on your strength and applauded your accomplishments. It has been a busy three years. You have made history on countless occasions. Your legacy will be felt by generations of Americans who will be able to enjoy freedom and feel safe walking our streets.

Without my wife Gloria I know my successes would have ended long ago. I ask you to continue to take care of each other and your families. They endure so much for us.

*Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley
12th Sergeant Major of the Army*